



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health and Family Services

Jim Doyle, Governor
Helene Nelson, Secretary

Special Needs Adoption Staff

Change to Base	FY 04		FY 05	
	GPR	All Funds	GPR	All Funds
Salary and Fringe	(\$157,700)	(\$269,400)	(\$420,600)	(\$718,400)
Supplies and Services	\$128,900	\$237,350	\$343,800	\$633,000
	(\$ 28,800)	(\$ 32,050)	(\$ 76,800)	(\$ 85,400)

Description of Proposal

- Reduces the number of state social workers and supervisors in the Special Needs Adoption Unit from 30.5 FTE to 16 FTE, for a net reduction of 14.5 positions over the 2003-2005 biennium as part of the Department's budget efficiency measures.

Background

- In response to the State's fiscal crisis, the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in DHFS has made administrative and operational cuts. The division will eliminate the positions of the Assistant to the Division Administrator, the Bureau Director for Children and Family Development, and an administrative support position in that bureau. Other staff will absorb most of the work assigned to these positions.
- Even before the financial pressures of the deficit necessitated budget reductions, the state adoption positions were transitioning to the role of permanency consultants. Going forward, teaming of state employees (who provide permanency consulting) with case management staff (from our private partner agencies) will produce the most effective and cost efficient outcomes for children and families.
- Implementation of the program will occur over the next 14 months and be concluded by June 30, 2004. That will allow staff to complete open cases so that the cases do not have to be reassigned to other adoption staff. It will also allow the Department to work with the valued state adoption staff in helping them transition to other positions within DHFS or to jobs outside the Department.

Rationale for Proposal

- Staffing reductions in the Special Adoptions Unit can be achieved while honoring and sustaining the Department's vital and ongoing commitment to the safety and permanent placement of children. The Department will do all it can to assist affected state employees in transitioning to other positions in DHFS or outside the Department.
- This change is cost effective. The average cost of a special needs adoption case since contracting with private agencies has remained relatively constant. It is anticipated that the Department will experience savings during the biennium in personnel costs. Although expenses for contracting will increase, net savings are projected for DCFS. The increased effectiveness of state staff in their consultation capacities will result in a reduced length of stay of children in expensive out-of-home care.

- Unlike other units in the Department, the Special Needs Adoption Program has not undergone staff reductions in the past eight years. These measures are difficult but necessary to meet our fiscal responsibilities while ensuring that we do not eliminate services or programs that are vital to Wisconsin citizens.
- It is the intent of the Department to enhance the state's overall efforts related to permanency planning, including fully integrating the concept of concurrent planning, through utilization of state adoption staff as consultants to counties both on specific cases and on system and best practice models designed to achieve safe, permanent and stable homes for children in out-of-home care.
- In this more specialized and defined role, state adoption staff will ensure that the most appropriate and timely permanency planning decisions are made and that earlier intervention, therapeutic and supportive services, and case decisions made throughout the adoption process will reduce the number of complex adoption cases referred to the Special Needs Adoption Program.
- As the Department assists counties in making permanency decisions more quickly, it will be possible to reduce the amount of time children are placed in out-of-home care before being reunified with their families, placed for adoption, or being otherwise permanently placed. Not only is this the best result for children and families; ultimately, this will assure that the state does not lose federal funds either through reductions in the number of adoptions or through failure to comply with federal or state laws regarding permanence for children.
- The expertise and knowledge of our private agency partners has enriched our adoption program. They are long-standing, statewide organizations with strong track records in human services provision. Through their involvement in the Special Needs Adoptions Program over the last several years, they have effectively been building expertise in the case management of adoptions of significant complexity, and have demonstrated their ability to provide effective results for children and families.
- Our private partners also provide important enhancement services such as education of and information to the public, and the recruitment and availability of adoptive and foster families for children who need homes. The structure of these organizations gives our children and families access to the other services these agencies provide, one result of which is an actual increase in the variety of services available to children served by these agencies in the Special Needs Adoption Program.
- During the transition phase, all state adoption staff will continue their current consultation responsibilities and gradually increase those responsibilities as their assigned adoption cases are finalized. When the transition is complete, the program will have 16 permanency consultants in the state, not the two that have otherwise been reported. This change is not expected to increase state travel costs. The shift in adoption responsibilities will not affect the guardianship responsibilities of the Department.
- The Department remains committed to achieving a record goal of over 1,300 special needs adoptions in 2003; composed of 700 in Milwaukee County and 600 in the balance of the state that are served by the Special Needs Adoption workers. The Department will work closely with counties through this transition and beyond, and it may be challenging to meet the monthly targets while affected state staff are transitioning to new positions and adjusting to their permanency roles. Better outcomes are expected to be achieved in the long term.